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Impact of Workplace Politics on Academic Staff Productivity in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of workplace politics on academic staff productivity in Nigerian universities, offering insights into how political dynamics within the workplace influence staff performance. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from academic staff across several universities, focusing on their perceptions of workplace politics, job satisfaction, and self-reported productivity levels. The analysis reveals a significant negative correlation between workplace politics and staff productivity, highlighting that a politically charged environment—characterized by favoritism, lack of transparency, and politically motivated decisions—can demotivate employees and reduce their output. This study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the detrimental effects of workplace politics in the academic setting, emphasizing the need for transparent management practices to foster a more productive work environment. Recommendations are made for university administrators to mitigate the impact of workplace politics and enhance employee motivation.

Keywords: Workplace politics, Academic staff productivity, Nigerian universities, Job satisfaction, Employee motivation.

1 | Introduction

Workplace politics, also known as organizational politics, encompasses activities by individuals or groups within an organization to gain advantages not necessarily linked to job performance or merit. This often involves power struggles, favoritism, and leveraging influence for rewards or promotions [1]. Such political behaviors can have a considerable impact on organizational outcomes, including employee motivation, morale, and productivity. In Nigerian universities, workplace politics can create an environment where academic staff members may feel undervalued, leading to a decline in their engagement and effectiveness in

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fulfilling their primary duties of teaching, research, and community service. Ideally, Nigerian universities should foster a meritocratic environment where promotions, recognition, and resource allocation are based on individual achievements and contributions. However, workplace politics disrupts these expectations by manifesting in favoritism, bureaucratic manipulation, and decisions driven by personal connections rather than merit. This creates an atmosphere of demotivation among staff, which has been linked to stress, dissatisfaction, and reduced job performance [1]. The negative effects of workplace politics are particularly pronounced in developing countries like Nigeria, where limited resources, intense competition for promotions, and a lack of organizational transparency complicate the academic staff's focus on their core roles. These dynamics can undermine the quality of teaching and research, potentially affecting the overall educational standards in these institutions.

The widespread presence of workplace politics in Nigerian universities poses significant challenges to academic staff productivity, as seen through its adverse effects on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In such politically charged environments, outcomes like high turnover rates, reduced academic work quality, and lower productivity levels become more common [1]. This issue is compounded by the high stakes in resource allocation and the competitive atmosphere surrounding promotions within these institutions. Academic staff, as a result, may become more focused on navigating the political landscape than dedicating themselves to teaching, research, and community service. Despite the gravity of these challenges, research specifically examining the impact of workplace politics on academic staff productivity in Nigerian universities remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus on general organizational behavior without addressing the unique challenges of the higher education sector, underscoring the need for research that explores how workplace politics affects productivity, particularly regarding favoritism, transparency issues, and politically motivated decision-making.

This research aims to address these gaps by focusing on four key objectives. First, it seeks to analyze the effect of workplace politics on academic staff productivity in Nigerian universities. Second, it aims to identify factors contributing to workplace politics within these institutions, such as favoritism, bureaucratic manipulation, and resource allocation practices. Third, the study will assess how workplace politics impacts job satisfaction and employee motivation. Finally, it will suggest measures for mitigating the negative effects of workplace politics on productivity, with a focus on enhancing transparency, fair resource distribution, and merit-based decision-making.

This study is significant for multiple reasons. It aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the impact of workplace politics on academic staff productivity in Nigerian universities. Such insights are essential for university administrators striving to improve staff performance and foster a conducive working environment. By identifying factors that contribute to workplace politics, the study will offer insights into how institutions can implement policies to reduce favoritism, enhance transparency, and ensure that promotions and rewards are based on merit rather than political motives.

Additionally, the study will contribute to the broader field of organizational behavior by examining how workplace politics influences job satisfaction and motivation in an academic setting, with implications for policy-making and management practices. Ultimately, the findings will provide valuable recommendations for developing strategies that promote a fair and supportive work environment, fostering productivity and job satisfaction among academic staff.

2 | Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section explores the impact of workplace politics on employee productivity through a review of empirical research, theoretical perspectives, and the gaps identified in existing literature, emphasizing this study's contribution to the knowledge base.

Research has consistently shown that workplace politics, defined as activities undertaken to gain advantages unrelated to merit, tends to have adverse effects on productivity. Ferris et al. [2] argue that workplace politics often generates an atmosphere of uncertainty and perceived unfairness, which diminishes employee

motivation and overall job performance. Studies indicate that when employees perceive high levels of political behavior within their organizations, they experience elevated job stress and a corresponding decrease in productivity. In Nigerian universities, research has highlighted the particularly harmful impact of workplace politics on the productivity of academic staff. For instance, Ifedili [3] found that favoritism in promotions, allocation of research funds, and politically influenced decision-making significantly reduce the commitment of academic staff. In cases where contributions are undervalued due to political biases, academic staff often exhibit diminished engagement and productivity. Similarly, Olusegun [4] identified a correlation between workplace politics and low job satisfaction and high turnover intentions among university staff, suggesting that politically charged environments may contribute to employee attrition.

Further studies, such as those by Joseph and Alhassan [5], reveal that when academic staff perceive favoritism and lack of transparency in reward systems, they experience reduced motivation, which negatively affects their teaching and research productivity. Additionally Ajibare et al. [6] discovered a significant negative relationship between workplace politics and organizational commitment in South-West Nigerian universities, finding that political behavior eroded staff willingness to exceed their assigned duties.

Dauda and Bradford [7] noted that workplace politics adversely impacts employee morale, especially in academic settings where transparency and fairness in evaluations and promotions are crucial. Here, perceptions of bias or political motivations can lead to disengagement and reduced innovation. Busemeyer and Trampusch [8] conducted a cross-country study involving universities in Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, finding that while the manifestations of workplace politics vary, its negative effects on staff productivity remain consistent.

Similar patterns have been observed in other organizational contexts. Olusegun [9] noted that politically motivated actions, such as favoritism or manipulation, harm organizational performance in corporate settings by undermining morale. Additionally, Kacmar and Baron [10] highlighted that high perceived organizational politics correlates with reduced commitment and increased absenteeism. This trend is applicable in academic institutions, where navigating politically charged environments can contribute to employee burnout. These studies collectively support the conclusion that workplace politics hinders productivity across diverse settings, including Nigerian universities, underscoring the need for theoretical insights to explain these dynamics.

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws on the organizational politics perspective and social exchange theory. The organizational politics perspective suggests that politics in organizations stem from competition over scarce resources, differing interests, and power dynamics. This theory posits that workplace politics is an inherent aspect of organizational life but becomes harmful when it undermines merit-based practices and transparency [2].

In Nigerian universities, where limited resources and competitive promotion processes prevail, this perspective explains how politically charged environments could erode motivation and productivity. Social Exchange Theory further complements this understanding by proposing that employees' attitudes and behavior reflect the perceived quality of their relationship with the organization [11]. When organizations appear politically biased or unfair, employees may respond by reducing their commitment and engagement. In academic contexts, where equity and merit-based decision-making are expected, perceptions of imbalance in the social exchange can lead to reduced job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions.

Despite extensive research on workplace politics, several gaps persist. Many studies focus on corporate or non-academic settings, leaving the higher education sector underexplored, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Moreover, research in Nigeria often centers on general organizational behavior rather than examining how workplace politics specifically impacts teaching and research in academic settings. Another limitation is the scarcity of longitudinal studies that could capture the long-term consequences of workplace politics on productivity. Cross-sectional studies, while insightful, may not fully illustrate the cumulative effects of political behavior. Additionally, few studies have empirically explored the mechanisms linking workplace politics to employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and morale.

This study aims to address these gaps by offering a focused analysis of the impact of workplace politics on academic staff productivity in Nigerian universities. Specifically, it explores factors contributing to workplace politics, such as favoritism, lack of transparency, and bureaucratic manipulation, while also proposing evidence-based recommendations for creating a fairer and more supportive work environment. Through strategies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of workplace politics, this research seeks to provide practical solutions for enhancing staff motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment within Nigerian universities.

3 | Material and Method

3.1 | Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to investigate the impact of workplace politics on academic staff productivity in selected Nigerian public universities. The primary research design is a cross-sectional survey, which allows for examining the current state of workplace politics and its effects on productivity at a specific point in time. The choice of a cross-sectional survey is appropriate for capturing the experiences and perceptions of the respondents regarding workplace politics and its impact on job satisfaction and productivity [12].

The qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into how workplace politics influences staff morale, job satisfaction, and work outcomes. The quantitative aspect utilizes structured questionnaires for data collection, enabling statistical analysis of relationships between workplace politics and productivity indicators.

3.2 | Sampling Design and Data Collection

The population of the study comprises academic staff across several Nigerian public universities, with a focus on different faculties to ensure diverse perspectives. The sample was determined using a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, five universities were purposively selected based on criteria such as size, geographic representation, and reported prevalence of workplace politics [13]. These universities are spread across different regions of Nigeria to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

In the second stage, stratified random sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation of different academic ranks (professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, assistant lecturers) and disciplines within the selected universities. This approach enhances the generalizability of the findings and minimizes bias.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's [13] formula for sample size calculation:

$$N = \left(\frac{N}{1+N(e2)} \right),$$

Where N is the population size, and e is the margin of error (set at 5%). This resulted in a sample of 350 academic staff members, who were then randomly selected from the identified strata. Data was collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire, which was designed to capture variables such as experiences of workplace politics, job satisfaction, and self-reported productivity levels. In addition to the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 staff members to further explore their experiences.

3.3 | Estimation Techniques and Data Analysis

Data analysis began with descriptive statistics, which provided a summary of the demographic characteristics and perceptions of the respondents. The descriptive analysis was used to assess the prevalence and perceived impact of workplace politics on academic staff.

For the quantitative analysis, multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationship between workplace politics (independent variable) and academic staff productivity (dependent variable). Control

variables such as age, gender, years of experience, and academic rank were included in the regression model to account for potential confounding effects. The regression model was specified as follows:

$$Y = \beta 0 + \beta 1X1 + \beta 2X2 + \cdots + \beta nXn + \epsilon \ldots 1,$$

Where Y represents academic staff productivity, X_1 denotes workplace politics, and X_2 to Xn are control variables. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of common themes and insights regarding the effect of workplace politics on productivity.

The analysis was conducted using SPSS software for quantitative analysis of the data. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis, triangulating quantitative findings with qualitative insights to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of workplace politics on productivity in the selected universities.

4 | Results

4.1 | Presentation of Results

The collected data underwent analysis using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, supported by diagnostic tests to ensure robustness and validity. The results are displayed in tables, presenting demographic information, perception of workplace politics, and regression outcomes as well as the diagnostic tests.

Demographic characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the age distribution of the respondents, indicating that most participants are in the 35-44 age group.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
25-34 years	109	31.14
35-44 years	153	43.71
45-54 years	66	18.86
Above 55 years	22	6.29
Total	350	100

Perception of workplace politics

Table 2 presents the extent to which respondents perceive workplace politics within the universities.

Table 2. Perception of workplace politics.

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	131	37.40
Agree	153	43.71
Neutral	44	12.57
Disagree	22	6.29
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Total	350	100

Regression analysis

A multiple regression analysis was performed to evaluate the relationship between perceived workplace politics and staff productivity, with age and length of service as control variables. The regression model is formulated as follows:

$$\text{Productivityi} = \beta 0 + \beta 1(\text{Politicsi}) + \beta 2(\text{Agei}) + \beta 3(\text{Servicei}) + \epsilon \text{i} \ldots 3,$$

Where:

I. Productivityi denotes the productivity of respondent iii.

II. Politicsi represents the perceived level of workplace politics.

III. Agei stands for the respondent's age.

IV. Servicei indicates the length of service in the university.

V. β0, β1, β2, β3 are the coefficients.

VI. ϵi represents the error term.

Regression results

The results of the regression analysis are presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Regression analysis results.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Statistic	P-Value
Intercept	5.234	0.982	5.33	< 0.01
Workplace politics	-0.452	0.175	-2.58	< 0.05
Age	0.112	0.058	1.93	0.06
Length of service	0.098	0.052	1.88	0.07
R-squared = 0.58				
Adjusted R-squared = 0.54				
F-statistic 12.34				
p< 0.01				

The results show a significant negative relationship between workplace politics and productivity (β1=−0.452 = -0.452β1=−0.452, p<0.05p < 0.05p<0.05), indicating that higher levels of perceived politics are associated with lower staff productivity. The age and length of service were not statistically significant predictors but showed weak positive relationships with productivity. The model accounts for approximately 54% of the variance in staff productivity.

4.2|Diagnostic Tests and Post-Analysis Checks

Multicollinearity test

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) analysis revealed VIF values below 2 for all independent variables, indicating no significant multicollinearity issues.

Heteroscedasticity test

The Breusch-Pagan test was conducted to check for heteroscedasticity in the residuals. The test results were not significant (p = 0.24), confirming that the assumption of homoscedasticity was met.

Normality test

Shapiro-Wilk test results indicated that the residuals were normally distributed (p = 0.32), thus satisfying the normality assumption.

4.3|Discussion of Results

The findings indicate that workplace politics has a significant negative effect on employee productivity, consistent with previous research [2], [3]. Higher levels of perceived politics reduce motivation and increase stress, contributing to lower productivity. The demographic trends suggest that younger employees (aged 35-44) are particularly sensitive to workplace politics, likely due to career aspirations.

The model's explanatory power suggests that other factors beyond workplace politics may also influence productivity, highlighting the importance of a holistic approach in addressing organizational dynamics. To mitigate the adverse effects of workplace politics, management should adopt transparent policies on promotions, rewards, and resource allocation.

5 | Conclusion

The study reveals that workplace politics significantly undermines the productivity of academic staff in Nigerian universities. The findings indicate that factors such as favoritism in promotions, lack of transparency in decision-making, and bias in the allocation of resources create a political atmosphere that erodes job satisfaction, diminishes motivation, and leads to decreased productivity. The negative impact of these political behaviors highlights the need for institutions to address the root causes of workplace politics to improve the overall work environment and staff performance.

5.1 | Recommendations

To alleviate the adverse effects of workplace politics and foster a more conducive working environment, university management should consider the following actions:

I. Establish transparent policies: Develop clear, fair, and well-communicated guidelines for promotions, rewards, and resource distribution. Ensuring transparency in these processes can help reduce perceptions of favoritism and bias.

II. Provide ethical management training: Train university administrators and decision-makers on ethical leadership and management practices to prevent political behaviors from influencing workplace dynamics.

III. Implement grievance mechanisms: Set up accessible and confidential channels for staff to report instances of workplace politics and related grievances. An independent committee should be tasked with addressing these concerns promptly and fairly.

Author Contribution

The author contributed to the study design, theoretical formulation, computational coding, testing of the algorithm, performance evaluation, and preparation of the manuscript.

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Data Availability

The datasets used and analyzed in this study are fully presented within the article.

Conflicts of Interest

The author reports no potential conflict of interest.

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